

YOBL

Year of Biblical Literacy

Week 25: Prophets in Pain - Jeremiah Part 1

Daily Reading for Week

- Song of Solomon 5-8, Psalm 12
- Jeremiah 1-3, Psalm 13
- Jeremiah 4-6, Psalm 14
- **Jeremiah 7-9**, Psalm 15
- Jeremiah 10-13, Psalm 16
- Jeremiah 14-17, Psalm 17
- Jeremiah 18-22, Psalm 18
- **Video: Jeremiah**

Focus of time together

To understand and empathise with the Kingdom of Judah as they try to make sense of their suffering and eventual exile.

Connecting Exercise

Share in a one minute or less how you experienced reading and learning about Wisdom Literature.

Opening Prayer

Pray Psalm 75 aloud.

Intro to Discussion

After our journey through the Wisdom Literature, we now begin looking at the books of the prophets that were written during Israel's exile — first, Jeremiah. The Book of Jeremiah can be overwhelming and disorienting. Jeremiah the prophet relays God's repeated, and at times, punishingly grim warnings to Israel. But at the same time, he expresses the urgent existential questions Israel was grappling with before and then during exile.

Jeremiah was the son of Hilkiah, the priest at Anathoth, and served as a prophet to Judah through the reign of Josiah, Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin, and Zedekiah, and he continued some time after the fall of Jerusalem in 587 B.C. Jeremiah was a young man

when he received God's prophetic call in 625 B.C. (*'I do not know how to speak; I am too young.'* Jeremiah 1:6), and he was tasked with warning Israel that because of their constant covenant disobedience and sin, they would soon be sent into exile. This message grieves Jeremiah, who deeply loves Israel.

He writes, *"My grief is beyond healing, my heart is sick within me; I hurt with the hurt of my people. I mourn and am overcome with grief; if only my head were a pool of water and my eyes a fountain of tears, I would weep day and night for all my people who have been slaughtered.* (Jeremiah 8:18, 21, 9:1 NLT)

In addition to relaying warnings from God, Jeremiah also voices the questions of his people. In 9:12, the people of Judah ask, *Who is wise enough to understand this? Who has been instructed by the Lord and can explain it? Why has the land been ruined and laid waste like a desert that no one can cross?*

Again in 14:19: *Why are you like a man taken by surprise, like a warrior powerless to save. You are among us, Lord, and we bear your name; do not forsake us!*

Jeremiah 5:19 succinctly sums up the core question of the people: *"Why has the LORD our God done all this to us?"* The people of Judah can't fathom why they were experiencing first drought, then starvation, and finally eventual destruction by the Babylonian army. What did it all mean? It is into this confusion and despair that Jeremiah is sent with very clear answers: this is punishment from Yahweh because Judah has broken the covenant they made with Him, done evil and injustice, relied on evil alliances with pagan nations rather than rely on God, and committed adultery against Yahweh. The disaster of exile was both the natural consequence of their sin and foolishness as well as divine judgement personally orchestrated by God.

Whole Group Discussion (40 minutes)

Questions for Interacting with Scripture

These questions are to help us slow down, to taste and notice Scripture, savour its richness and meditate on its complexity of meaning.

1. Read Jeremiah 7:1-29. Why did the people of Judah think that they were safe in Jerusalem and that the temple would never be destroyed?
2. What do you think it was like for the Jews entering the temple to hear Jeremiah proclaim that God would actually destroy the temple Himself in response to their evil hypocrisy?
3. Read Jeremiah 25:29 and 49:12. These verses and chapter 7 highlight Judah's stubbornness in their belief that they were safe from God's wrath simply because they were God's people living in God's city (Jerusalem) and worshipping in God's house (the temple). How did Jeremiah challenge this notion of Judah's safety and security from suffering?
4. Read Jeremiah 44:15-18. After the exile, how was the remnant of Judah trying to make sense of the nation's extreme suffering (including drought, famine, violence, war, rape, enslavement, and deportation)? In other words, why did they think they were suffering?
5. Read Jeremiah 44:20-23. How did Jeremiah challenge this understanding? In other words, according to God and Jeremiah, why was Judah suffering exile?

Small Group Discussion (30 minutes)

Questions for Listening to Scripture

These questions are to help us be affected by Scripture in the way it was intended to affect us.

The scene in Jeremiah 7 is shocking. Jeremiah, a priest, stands at the entrance to the temple and proclaims incredible judgment upon those entering to worship Yahweh. Specifically, he deplores the hypocrisy of their worship and their feeling of being safe because of their performance of religious rituals: “Will you steal and murder, commit adultery and perjury, burn incense to Baal and follow other gods you have not known, and then come and stand before me in this house, which bears my Name, and say, ‘We are safe’ – safe to do all these detestable things?” This would be like having a welcomer at church on Sunday declaring to those entering, “You think you’re safe from God’s judgment because you show up at church even though when you’re done here, you steal and murder and commit adultery? Yeah right!”

1. Is there any way in which your faith imitates the faith of those whom Jeremiah was challenging at the temple?
2. Is there any hypocrisy in your faith that warrants rebuke?
3. Throughout the book of Jeremiah, the prophet explains that Israel and Judah have been punished for three interconnected reasons: 1) Committing idolatry; 2) Breaking the terms of the covenant; and 3) Doing evil and injustice rather than righteousness and justice. Jeremiah summarises the foolishness of the people by saying, “*They do not know the way of the Lord, the requirements of their God*” (Jeremiah 5:4). In what way do the harsh and challenging words of Jeremiah offer you an invitation to reassess what it is that God requires of you?

Closing Prayer

Recall these words from Jeremiah 7:5-7:

“If you really change your ways and your actions and deal with each other justly, if you do not oppress the foreigner, the fatherless or the widow and do not shed innocent blood in this place, and if you do not follow other gods to your own harm, then I will let you live in this place, in the land I gave your ancestors for ever and ever”.

God’s invitation to repentance and restoration has been available since the beginning. Reflect for a moment on tonight’s discussion and then express to God any confession, repentance, or other kind of prayer that you feel led to pray.